VOLUME 66 • ISSUE 02
SUMMER 2026

RIVERWATCH

A publication from
Save the American River Association
a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization

WATER FORUM 2050 AGREEMENT SIGNED

BY JOHN BRIGGS, WATER COMMITTEE CHAIR

The Sacramento Water Forum is a voluntary organization started by the City and County of Sacramento in 1993 in recognition that the lower American River requires diligent management to protect valuable municipal water supplies and the rich habitat that thrives in this corridor.

The lower American River is that stretch from Nimbus Dam to the confluence of the Sacramento River. It is designated as a Wild and Scenic River under both state and federal law. In 1990 the State Water Board warned that the then flow standards were not adequate to protect the lower American River.

The Water Forum brought together diverse stakeholders including businesses, environmental groups and Sacramento basin water purveyors

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View from the former Kassis property - Photo by Carl Salmonsen

Update on the Kassis Site Acquisition

BY MARK BERRY

Negotiations regarding the acquisition of the Kassis site continue to move forward. Discussions are currently focused on determining the property's fair market value, which will establish the basis for the acquisition.

Once the purchase price is finalized, the mechanisms for short-term acquisition funding and long-term financing can be fully evaluated. At that point, the amount of private funding and philanthropic support needed to complete the transaction will become clearer.

The participation of donors and larger equity contributors will be critical to successfully closing what will be an important land acquisition in the history of the American River Parkway. Protecting this property and incorporating it into the Parkway represents a unique opportunity to preserve valuable habitat and open space for future generations. The Parkway is a narrow strip of green and needs land acquisitions to ensure its sustainability.

We extend our sincere gratitude to everyone who has already contributed or pledged support toward this effort. Your generosity, environmental stewardship, and commitment to the Parkway will leave a lasting legacy. The benefits of your support will endure far beyond today, helping preserve the natural character of the American River Parkway for generations to come. ■

President's corner

PRESERVING THE AMERICAN RIVER PARKWAY: A COLLECTIVE COMMITMENT

Like our river – always coming, always going, and always present, so too are the challenges of protecting the natural qualities of the American River Parkway. The Parkway did not come into existence by accident, nor does it continue simply because it exists today. It took a formidable effort by countless individuals, organizations, and public leaders to create it, and that effort continues every day to preserve its riparian habitat, wildlife, and natural character.

Because of its beauty and the hard-fought work that created and sustains it, the Parkway remains attractive to those seeking development opportunities, expanded recreational uses, and other activities that can, at times, come at the expense of the Parkway's essential natural qualities.

For the Parkway to survive as a living natural corridor, it requires the ongoing commitment of SARA members, supporters, neighborhood groups, and Parkway stakeholders. Together, we help resist the very human impulses that can threaten the river we have worked so hard to protect.

When SARA raises funds or receives donations, those resources go directly toward Parkway preservation and advocacy efforts. At times, we are compelled to pursue legal challenges when the voice of the river might otherwise go unheard. Throughout this newsletter, you will read about the efforts of the many individuals and organizations working tirelessly to keep our Parkway safe, natural, and protected.

Any success SARA achieves depends on neighborhood groups and individuals like you who recognize issues that threaten or impact the river. You are not only SARA's eyes and ears–you are truly the heart of this organization.

Throughout SARA's history, serious threats to the Parkway have arisen. Time and again, it has been individuals who stepped outside their comfort zones and took action, often at great personal effort, who made the difference. They acted even when others said success was impossible. They acted because protecting the river mattered.

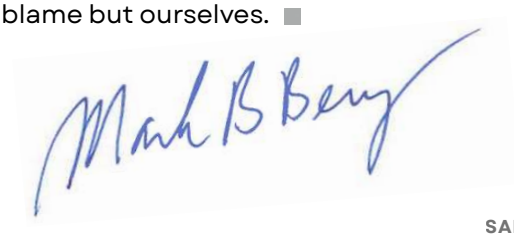
"Any success SARA achieves depends on neighborhood groups and individuals like you who recognize issues that threaten or impact the river. You are not only SARA's eyes and ears—you are truly the heart of this organization."

Mark Berry
SARA President

SARA must continue to grow, remain steadfast in defending the Parkway, and seize opportunities to support your efforts to speak on behalf of the river.

Together, we help preserve a unique American asset -- the only State and Federal Wild and Scenic River flowing through a major metropolitan area. The Parkway is enjoyed by people from all walks of life and stands as a living example that authentic natural environment and urban communities can coexist.

That coexistence is not guaranteed. It requires vigilance, commitment, and participation.
SARA thanks each of you for stepping away from your busy lives to support this effort. Your volunteer work, donations, advocacy, and passion make a difference every day. If we don't show up, we will have nobody to blame but ourselves. ■



Water Forum

Continued from Page 1

to negotiate and adopt in 2000 the initial 25-year Water Forum Agreement. This was a major accomplishment given the diverse interests at stake. But all stakeholders recognized then and now that only through cooperation, this essential resource can be preserved and enhanced.

The first Water Forum Agreement adopted coequal goals; (1) provide a reliable and safe water supply for the region and (2) preserve the fishery, wildlife, recreational and aesthetic values of the lower American River.

Clyde Macdonald represented SARA in negotiations for the first Water Forum Agreement and was instrumental as its representative on the Water Forum Environmental Caucus in negotiating the new agreement called the Water Forum 2050 Agreement covering the next 25 years. His mastery of the subject matter is well known and Clyde received special recognition at the signing ceremony held on May 11, 2026.

Wade Crowfoot, Secretary of the Department of Natural Resources was the keynote speaker and captured the spirit of the Water Forum when he said, "California faces growing water challenges driven by climate change, and the Sacramento region continues to demonstrate the value of collaboration and long-term planning with a multi-benefit approach."

State Senator **Roger Niello** also spoke about the unique nature of this cooperative approach, having been involved in the initial agreement.

Some essential elements of Water Forum 2050 are:

- American River Climate Adaptation Program which seeks more flexibility to adapt water use and storage such as groundwater recharge (banking), source shifting depending on conditions, conservation and flexible reservoir operations.

"California faces growing water challenges driven by climate change, and the Sacramento region continues to demonstrate the value of collaboration and long-term planning with a multi-benefit approach."

Wade Crowfoot, Secretary of the Department of Natural Resources

- Flow management by implementation of a Flow Management Standard providing guidelines for the operations of Folsom Dam to protect river health such as minimum flows and temperature controls and to promote reliable water supplies through flexible storage strategies.
- Conjunctive use which shifts water use to the river in wet years and promotes groundwater banking and then shifts to groundwater use in dry years to preserve flows and habitat health.
- Promotion of infrastructure construction and modification to help address the challenges of climate change by providing more flexibility to the overall system.
- Habitat restoration projects implemented by the Water Forum such as enhanced and restored spawning locations and channels.
- Development of refined metrics, science and monitoring to better understand the overall system to be able to adapt to new conditions.

The challenges facing the Sacramento region seem overwhelming at times, but the Water Forum provides the opportunity to jointly understand and coordinate water management for a healthy community and environment. The contributions of people like Clyde Macdonald on behalf of SARA are invaluable. ■

SUPPORT COUNTY PARKS

For as little as $70 per year, you can have unlimited access and parking in the parks. All funds go directly towards maintaining and operating the 15,000-acre system. Pass holders receive free daily entry into Regional Parks and annual passes are valid for one year from the date of purchase.

Pass Fees Are Based On Use:

Vehicle: **$70**

Vehicle + Trailer/Boat/RV: **$130**

Senior Citizen Vehicle*: **$35**

Senior Citizen Vehicle + Trailer/Boat/RV*: **$65**

**Senior discount passes must be purchased in person at the County Parks office. Discount applies to ages 65 or older and must have proof of age at time of purchase.*

Where to Purchase Your Parks Pass:

- Online through the County's Purchasing Portal https://govhub.com/sacramento/regionalparks
- Regional Park offices and park kiosks
- Mail in a completed Parks Annual Pass Application to:
  Parks Passes
  10361 Rockingham Dr.
  Sacramento, CA 95827
- Visit https://regionalparks.saccounty.gov/ for a list of retail locations where you can purchase a Pass.

A Community Celebration: A Day of Play and Bench Dedication at Sailor Bar

By Jodi King, Chairperson, Friends of Sailor Bar

Thanks to **Congressman Ami Bera**, who initiated a bi-partisan resolution for a *National Day of Play*, and to **Supervisor Rich Desmond** for initiating the resolution to make it official for Sacramento County.

How fitting it was to have the dedication of the 19 new benches and tables at the beautiful overlook now known as "Warren's SARA Bench" on the Day of Play. Congressman Bera said that March 21, 2026 was selected because it is a week before the Spring Equinox and symbolizes rebirth and renewal.

Supervisor Desmond said, "We made lemonade out of lemons." He spoke about the County's decision to pause on their plan to allow cars into the interior of Sailor Bar Park, and the shift to use the passion and dedication of the community to collaborate toward our mutual goals. Together, we have succeeded.

Today, Sailor Bar is a popular place for hiking and simply resting on a bench to enjoy the views. **Diane Woodruff**, who is in her 80's, presented that Sailor Bar is much more accessible for people with limited mobility and the elderly. SARA President **Mark Berry** provided an insightful introduction to **Warren Truitt**, the immediate past president of SARA. Warren spoke about his experiences from when he was first recruited by **Alan Wade**. You can see the entire dedication on the Friends of Sailor Bar YouTube channel: www.youtube.com/@FriendsofSailorBar

Liz Bellas, Sacramento County Regional Parks Department Director, cuts a ribbon during the bench dedication ceremony at Sailor Bar on March 21

Visit the Friends of Sailor Bar Facebook page for updates on scheduled work days and fun activities throughout the year: www.facebook.com/protectsailorbar ■

BOARD MEMBER SPOTLIGHT: A CONVERSATION WITH ERIC WEBB

SARA's Board of Directors is made up of dedicated volunteers who share a deep commitment to protecting the Lower American River and Parkway. In this issue of *RiverWatch*, we spoke with Board Member and Secretary Eric about what first inspired him to get involved, what the Parkway means to him personally, and why he remains optimistic about its future.

What first inspired you to get involved with SARA?
I first became inspired to get involved with SARA while working for the Sacramento Public Library. One of our volunteers and my friend, Jane Hagedorn, encouraged me to join her on the Advisory Council. I have a deep interest in our local ecology, and there is nothing more central to that than the American River.

What do the Lower American River and Parkway mean to you personally?
I *spent my earliest years living in Green Bay (Wisconsin), a half mile from Lake Michigan, so when my family moved to Fair Oaks in the mid 70s, I was naturally attracted to the American River. I have a lot of fond memories of the Parkway in my middle and high school years. One of my favorites is my wildflower collection that I created for my high school biology class at Bella Vista. My primary resource was the American River Parkway.*

What do you see as the most important challenge facing the Lower American River today?
Certainly too many to count. The constant threat of development comes to mind. While other river cities, like Pittsburgh and Cincinnati, have hardscaped their riverfronts, we have the unique riparian corridor that is the American River, which requires constant vigilance. On a larger scale, climate change poses an immense challenge. Our snowpack will continue to shrink and water scarcity will become even more fraught.

What gives you hope for the future of the American River Parkway and its protection?
Our young people give me hope. They are discovering the natural world in their formal education as elementary and high school students that many of us in my generation only discovered in college. SARA was at the vanguard of the environmental revolution of the 1960s and 1970s. I believe that our children will rekindle the spirit of this movement.

Eric's appreciation for the American River extends beyond conservation. As a local historian, he has also explored the region's rich Gold Rush heritage.

He is the co-author of *Lost Gold Rush Towns of Sacramento*, which uncovers the stories of once-thriving communities that helped shape the Sacramento region. "I co-authored the book *Lost Gold Rush Towns of Sacramento*, published last year by History Press on behalf of the Sacramento Public Library. While my co-authors, James Scott and Andrew McLeod, focused on the lowland towns such as Sutterville, Norristown and Brighton, I concentrated on the upland towns of Mormon Island, Negro Hill and Prairie City. All of these communities were significant competitors to Sacramento in the early years of the California Gold Rush, and although scarcely remembered, these towns had an outsized historical significance to early California. We explore their respective demises, which included some nefarious engineering of the American River." ■

SARA MEMBERSHIP DONATIONS

FEBRUARY - MAY 2026

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John Briggs
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Eric Webb
Betsy & Fred Weiland
Steve & Tracy Wetzel
Lynda White
Glory Wicklund
Mackenzie Wieser
in honor of Betsy Weiland
Leo & Brenda Winternitz
Donald & Gloria Yost

SARA appreciates the support of our generous members. Without your support, SARA would not be able to continue our role as *Guardians of the American River and Parkway since 1961*. New and renewing members are listed in RiverWatch according to their preference (indicated on the SARA membership/ renewal form).

IN MEMORIAM

Save the American River Association has received donations in memory of the following friends:

John Cox
Dee Cummings
Michael D. Feil
Eric R. Gerstung
Don Gustin
Bruce Handley
Will Hodges
Allen & Nathalene Lewis
Carol Pantages
Alan Wade

SARA frequently receives donations in memory of lost loved ones, many of whom were users and supporters of the American River Parkway. Some donors give names. Others prefer to remain anonymous. SARA notifies family members when donations are made. The money is used to further SARA's advocacy work on behalf of the Parkway.

Contributions may be made by check or online via SARA's Web site. SARA also has a Legacy program. For information on the program, please contact the SARA office.

Board of Supervisors Adopts Park Protection Ordinances Including E-Bike Measures

In a unanimous decision during its meeting on May 12, the Sacramento County Board of Supervisors adopted significant updates to local ordinances aimed at enhancing the protection of parks and recreation facilities. The changes, proposed by Sacramento County Regional Parks, respond to increasing concerns regarding the safety and environmental impacts of Class 3 e-bikes, e-motorcycles, dirtbikes, and unauthorized trail construction.

The newly enacted ordinances will take effect 30 days from the date of adoption. Violations can result in penalties ranging from infractions to misdemeanors, signaling a serious commitment to safeguarding park users and preserving natural areas.

"These updates will empower our Rangers to better educate visitors about appropriate park use while enforcing rules that preserve our parklands," said Liz Bellas, Regional Parks Director. "Our goal is to strike a balance between recreational enjoyment and stewardship of our community's natural resources."

The rising popularity of unpermitted, high-speed e-bikes and e-motorcycles has raised safety alarms, as these vehicles pose significant risks due to their speed. A report by the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission highlighted a troubling trend: injuries associated with micromobility devices have increased annually by an average of 23% since 2017, with children aged 14 and under accounting for a substantial portion of these incidents.

"Our goal is to strike a balance between recreational enjoyment and stewardship of our community's natural resources."

Liz Bellas
Regional Parks Director

The ordinance revisions specifically address problematic behaviors that have escalated in environmentally sensitive areas, particularly along the American River Parkway. Unauthorized off-road bicycle courses, often created by users without permission, have led to increased vandalism and damage to natural habitats, posing dangers to pedestrians and equestrians alike.

In response, the new regulations provide Regional Parks staff with clearer authority to intervene against unauthorized trail construction and other harmful activities. This includes the ability to seek restitution for the costs associated with restoring damaged areas.

For more information on the updated ordinances, residents are encouraged to visit the Sacramento County Regional Parks website: regionalparks.saccounty.gov

Rio Americano Stadium Project Raises Concerns for the American River Parkway

San Juan Unified School District intends to construct a high-intensity sports and events stadium at Rio Americano High School, a site that borders the Wild & Scenic Lower American River and the American River Parkway. The District's intended project has raised significant concerns among those committed to protecting one of California's most treasured natural resources.

The District intends to transform the school's modest athletic field into a large sports and events venue featuring permanent stadium lighting, amplified sound, an elevated press box with HVAC equipment, and seating for 2,500 spectators—an increase of more than 768% over the existing 288 bleacher seats. The project would also substantially expand the frequency, duration, and year-round use of the facility.

The issue is not whether schools should provide athletic facilities for students. Rather, it is whether a high-intensity stadium of this scale belongs immediately adjacent to one of California's most protected river corridors.

The American River Parkway provides critical habitat for wildlife, serves as an important migratory corridor for birds, and offers recreation and respite for thousands of people. Increased nighttime lighting, amplified sound, larger crowds, and more frequent events and use will alter the character of this protected setting, affecting both wildlife and visitors.

Save the American River Association (SARA), in partnership with the **Rio Americano Community Alliance**, is working to educate the community about the full scope of the District's planned project, encourage informed public participation, and advocate for a thorough and transparent review of its environmental impacts.

Many community members remain unaware of the project's true scale and its proximity to the Parkway. As the environmental review moves forward, SARA will continue advocating for a transparent process and for protecting the Wild & Scenic Lower American River and American River Parkway from impacts that could permanently alter this irreplaceable public resource.

For more information, including how you can help, visit **www.rioalliance.org**.

Court Cases Continue on Lawsuit Over Army Corps Erosion Control Work

BY PETE SPAULDING

In August 2025, American River Trees (ART), Save the American River Association (SARA), and the Center for Biological Diversity (CBD), filed a lawsuit against the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the National Park Service (NPS), and the Central Valley Flood Protection Board (CVFPB) claiming CEQA, NEPA, and federal and state Wild and Scenic Rivers Act violations for the proposed American River Common Features Project, Contracts 3B and 4B.

In November 2025, the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of California granted ART's request for a Preliminary Injunction to enjoin any ground or vegetation disturbing activity on the American River Parkway authorized under Contract 3B until the Court reaches a final decision on our case. This means that tree clearing and other vegetation removal cannot occur until our lawsuit is resolved on its merits by the Court. The legal process continues...

On January 20, 2026 the US Dept of Justice filed a notice to appeal the Injunction on behalf of the Corps and the National Park Service. It is presently unclear whether they will actually pursue their appeal of the preliminary injunction.

Because the CVFPB was unwilling to consent to our state law claims being heard in federal court (based on state "sovereign immunity" under which state entities can avoid federal court), we have filed against the CVFPB in state court asserting violations of the California Wild and Scenic Rivers Act. The parties are conferring regarding the administrative record. No timetable has yet been established for briefing and arguing the merits of this case.

The Plaintiffs, ART, SARA and the CBD, filed a Motion for Summary Judgement on April 1, 2026 and both parties, plaintiffs and defendants, completed their briefing on the merits of the federal case on June 10, 2026.

While we wait for the federal judge's decision, we are exploring what actions we will take should we win, or lose, our case in Federal Court. That way, we will be prepared to act no matter what the outcome. Our goal is to minimize destruction to the American River Parkway under Contracts 3B and 4B, while keeping the banks and levees of the American River protected from erosion, thereby keeping Sacramento safe from flooding.

So, the preliminary injunction is still in place. Our Parkway is still intact, the fall salmon run was one of the best in years, sea lions have been seen swimming in the Grist Mill recreation area, bald eagles are visiting the Larchmont Park area, and the bobcats are still thriving. We remain optimistic and will do all we can to get the erosion control and flood protection that we need, without destroying the Parkway. The federal district court should rule on the federal case sometime this summer. ■

Our goal is to minimize destruction to the American River Parkway under Contracts 3B and 4B, while keeping the banks and levees of the American River protected from erosion, thereby keeping Sacramento safe from flooding.

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GUARDIANS OF THE AMERICAN RIVER AND PARKWAY SINCE 1961

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My gift to SARA is a:

☐ Renewal ☐ New Membership ☐ Non Membership Donation

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May we publish your name as a SARA member in a future *RiverWatch* issue?
*(Contribution amount will **not** be included)* ☐ Yes ☐ No, thank you

Please indicate your total contribution $ _____

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Please provide credit card info below or go to our secure Web site to donate: sarariverwatch.org -VISA, Mastercard, AmEx or Discover accepted

The following membership categories are suggested:

$10-24	Student	$25-49	Regular
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